

Sense of adventure needed to eat this Nordic cuisine

By Katie Baker, Newsweek

When foodies hear the word “Fäviken,” it conjures up dark spruce forests, deep Scandinavian cold, and a hunting, foraging chef whose 14-seat restaurant in the remote Swedish hinterlands has become a pilgrimage site for global gastronomes.

Now, Magnus Nilsson is bringing his robust brand of New Nordic cuisine—famous dishes include wild trout roe in a crust of dried pig’s blood, and scallops cooked over burning juniper branches—to his first cookbook, *Fäviken*, out Oct. 1 from Phaidon Press.

Not yet 30, with wild blond hair and babyish cheeks, Nilsson is a local Jämtland kid who worked in two of Paris’s greatest kitchens before returning home to run an eatery whose intense commitment to locavorism is perhaps rivaled only by René Redzepi’s *Noma* in Copenhagen.

Like Redzepi, Nilsson crafts his menus out of rare ingredients specific to his corner of the world—reindeer lichen, lingonberries, black grouse—and his familiarity with the Swedish landscape is deep and reverent. He knows how to stuff a hare’s cavity with pine branches to keep it from spoiling; where to find tufted vetch and edible lupin; how to drain the blood from a wild bird to keep its flesh fresh and flavorful.

Nilsson’s reliance on the bounty of his surroundings is, of course, what makes *Fäviken* so famous—and also what makes the cookbook less of a practical how-to for the home chef and more of an ode to a fantastical place and a type of cooking that has mostly disappeared from the Western world. Few but the most monkish of readers will have the time, equipment, or

dedication that Nilsson counsels for his dishes.

Recipes call for fresh cow hearts, rib-eyes “dry-aged for 20 weeks,” and burning marrow bones sawed apart at the table. Pantry staples include birch syrup, moose-meat powder, and mead. Dishes can take a year or two to prepare due to the drying time for marigold petals or the fermenting process for grey peas.

One of the most enchanting things about the book is its powerful sense of place: its pages shimmer with the mountains and glens of Jämtland, a region supposedly created by the Norse god Thor “during a drunken accident” and whose woods and streams team with fish and fowl. Nilsson’s recipes are paeans to this wilderness: capercaillie and “coniferous forest”; pine-bark cake with wood sorrel; pork broth filtered through moss. Nilsson tracks his menus as they change with the seasons: here, in spring, are fresh mussels, wild onions, and thrush. By summer, the kitchen bursts with ripe berries and herbs. Fall brings chanterelles, fat geese, and decaying leaves. Winter is austere, all about survival, with cured meats and jams and all manner of vegetables pickled and dried.

This is the type of food that Nilsson’s grandparents ate—rektun mat, or “real food”—and the emphasis is on the earthy and the super-fresh. The techniques are from another time, too—such as knowing how to butcher a cow to use all its parts. It’s cooking from a pre-industrial – or maybe post-apocalyptic—age. (Globalism does creep in: the staff’s favorite family meal is Hawaiian pizza, with ham and pineapple.)

As a teenager, Nilsson says he sketched out a 20-year business plan that “ended in me running the best restaurant in the world.” But when he first started at Fäviken, the restaurant was so isolated and unknown that he could barely recruit extra staff members. Yet he never gave up his belief that his food would be of a “high-enough quality to make it worth travelling

for.”

He’s clearly passed that mark: the restaurant is often booked up months in advance. For the rest of us who can’t make the trip, there’s this cookbook, and its little slice of his “magic culinary wonderland out there in the wilderness.”